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High-level segment
Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy

Draft ministerial declaration of the high-level segment submitted by the President of the Economic and Social Council on the basis of informal consultations

Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy

1. *We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations participating in the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council*, held from 5 to 7 July 2000, having considered the theme "Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy", have adopted the following declaration.

2. We recognize a wide consensus that information and communication technologies (ICT) are central to the creation of the emerging global knowledge-based economy and can play an important role in accelerating growth, in promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty in developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition and in facilitating their effective integration into the global economy. We note with appreciation the emphasis placed on ICT in the Secretary-General's reports to the forthcoming Millennium Summit and the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council. This consensus is reflected most recently in the declaration of the South Summit held in Havana. We note the priority being accorded to this subject in the preparations for the G-8 Summit to be held in Okinawa, Japan.

3. We appreciate the efforts deployed by all countries, including at the regional level, in preparing for the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council, in particular the organization of the African

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Development Forum 1999: The challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age, held in October 1999, the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar on Information Technology and Development, held in Florianopolis, Brazil, in June 2000, and the Regional Round Table on Information Technology and Development for the Asia and Pacific Region, held in New Delhi, India in June 2000. We take note of the Florianopolis Declaration and of the recommendations of the Regional Round Table.

4. The ICT revolution opens vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development but also poses challenges and risks. Along with important economic and social benefits, it can lead to further widening disparities between and within countries. While considering the impact of ICT on the creation of a global knowledge-based economy, we highlight that the majority of the world population still lives in poverty and remains untouched by the ICT revolution. The emerging new economy, characterized by a rapidly increasing reliance of value creation on information and knowledge, still remains concentrated in the developed countries. Unless access to and use of ICT is broadened, the majority of people particularly in the developing countries will not enjoy the benefits of the new knowledge-based economy.

5. We are deeply concerned that, at present, ICT's huge potential for advancing development, in particular of the developing countries, has not been fully captured. This reality has given rise to manifestations of the "digital divide". In this regard, urgent and concerted actions at the national, regional and international levels are imperative for bridging the digital divide and building digital opportunities and putting ICT firmly in the service of development for all. In this regard, we call on all members of the international community to work cooperatively to bridge the digital divide and to foster "digital opportunity". In this context, we recognize the need to address the major impediments to the participation of the majority of the people in the developing countries in the revolution of ICT, such as lack of infrastructure, education, capacity-building, investment and connectivity.

6. ICT provides unique opportunities for economic growth and human development. It can shape and enhance a wide range of development applications — from electronic commerce to access to financial markets; from generating employment to providing opportunities for investment to entrepreneurs, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises; from improved agricultural and manufacturing productivity to the empowerment of all sections of society; from long-distance education to tele-medicine; from environmental management and monitoring to prevention and management of disasters. The potential to help foster sustainable development, empower people, including women and youth, build capacities and skills, assist small- and medium-sized enterprises, reduce poverty, and reinforce popular participation and informed decision-making at all levels is enormous. The promotion of ICT should not be a substitute for the efforts to ensure the development and modernization of basic sectors of the economy but should complement and enhance these efforts.

7. Access to information and knowledge-sharing is largely determined by education, capabilities, including resources, transparent societies, capacity to generate and utilize knowledge, connectivity and the availability of diverse content and applications, and the policy and legal/regulatory framework. These areas require urgent action at the national and international levels to improve the capacity of all

countries, particularly the developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to participate in the knowledge-based economy in order to promote their economic and social development.

8. Efforts to achieve universal connectivity, particularly at the lower income levels, in all countries and especially in developing countries, will require innovative approaches and partnerships, including group and community connectivity and private-sector investment. In this regard, the establishment of integrated multipurpose and multimedia community information centres will be important.

9. In addition to establishing connectivity, capacity (human as well as institutional) is critical in sustaining access and ensuring that its benefits are captured by society. Investment in education, including basic and digital literacy, remains the fundamental way of developing human capacity and should be at the heart of any national, regional and international information technology strategy.

10. Besides connectivity and human and institutional capacities, the availability of diverse content can encourage access. The development of local content on the Internet and the ability of people to freely access it will help foster a culturally and linguistically diverse cyberspace and encourage broad and sustainable use of the Internet. Local content can also facilitate entrance to the knowledge-based economy for individuals and firms in developing countries and also as a means to expand their participation in the new networked economy.

11. The ability to use ICT could contribute to the improvement of the capabilities of firms, including small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in developing countries, to participate in international markets. Electronic commerce offers the possibility to increase opportunities to access world markets and to accelerate economic growth. Towards that end, concerted efforts are needed at the national, regional and international levels to create a conducive environment. In this context, special attention should be paid to those countries that lack the capacity to effectively participate in electronic commerce.

12. Market forces are fundamental but they alone will not suffice to put ICT in the service of development. Effective and meaningful collaborative efforts are required, involving Governments, multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to enhance the developmental impact of ICT. Such efforts should include transfer of technology to developing countries on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed, especially technology related to knowledge-based sectors, the mobilization of resources from all sources, public and private, at the national and international levels, and promoting capacity-building.

13. We recognize that consistent and coherent actions at the national and local levels are essential for making ICT for development programmes effective and sustainable and appropriate to the particular national and local context. In this regard, best practices and lessons learned by countries and communities that have already implemented ICT programmes need to be drawn from and built upon. Developed countries should share with developing and transition economy countries their experience in promoting and establishing ICT sectors in their own economies so that mistakes are avoided and benefits maximized.

14. National programmes for putting ICT in the service of development must be integrated into national development strategies, as defined and implemented on the basis of national priorities and on the principle of national ownership of such strategies. These programmes need to enunciate a national vision of challenges and approaches, establish national priorities and, as appropriate, a national focal point, and provide a conducive environment for the rapid diffusion, development and use of information technology. These national programmes could include, *inter alia*:

(a) Establishing a transparent and consistent legal and regulatory framework that foster ICT development including, as appropriate, by removing impediments to growth in the ICT sector;

(b) Development of the basic infrastructure necessary for connectivity including for most remote areas;

(c) Application of ICT, wherever possible, in public institutions, such as schools, hospitals, libraries, government departments and agencies;

(d) Generation, development and enhancement of local content transmitted by ICT through, *inter alia*, the introduction of local language character sets;

(e) Promoting access to ICT for all by supporting the provision of public access points;

(f) Measures to bring down connectivity costs to make it affordable, including through market-based mechanisms and competition, as appropriate;

(g) Development of appropriate policies to promote investment in ICT sector;

(h) Making the necessary investment in human resource development and strengthening the institutions and networks for the production, acquisition, absorption and dissemination of knowledge products;

(i) Technical preparation of national manpower for securing national capacities to administrate information systems and to develop sustainable ICT projects;

(j) Promoting the digital enhancement of already established mass media;

(k) Developing strategies to link established technologies, such as radio and television, with new technologies, such as the Internet;

(l) Promotion of the creation of technological incubators linked to universities and centres for research.

15. The United Nations system, in particular the Economic and Social Council, can play a key role in promoting synergies and coherence of all efforts directed to expand the development impact of ICT in the following ways:

(a) Supporting national actions aimed at harnessing the potential of ICT for development through providing assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition aimed at fully and beneficially integrating them into the networked knowledge-based global economy, and strengthening their capacity in building infrastructure and generating content;

(b) Serving as a global forum to accelerate and promote universal access to knowledge and information, contribute, as appropriate, within their respective

mandate to the development of norms and standards on a transparent, meaningful and participatory basis, taking into account in a balanced manner, development priorities and incentive for innovations and contribute to addressing such issues as cultural diversity, information ethics, privacy, security and cyber-crime;

(c) Contributing to a more systematic, ongoing identification, review and dissemination, especially at the regional level, including through networks of learning communities, of ICT expertise, distance learning programmes, information and reliable data on ICT, case studies, best practices and successful models, thus becoming an important "knowledge bank" in this field;

(d) Emphasizing the importance of universal access to knowledge and information for promoting development;

(e) Providing global leadership in bridging the digital divide and promoting digital opportunity, and adopting, in order to enhance the capacity of the United Nations system to achieve these goals, a coherent system-wide ICT strategy that would ensure coordination and synergy among programmes and activities of individual organizations of the system and transform it into a knowledge-based system of organizations;

(f) Promoting the complementary roles of old and new media in bridging the "digital divide", through, *inter alia*, the United Nations TV Forum;

(g) Bringing together the relevant actors from the public and private sectors to build partnership.

16. All members of the international community should make a commitment, at the highest level to strive to bridge the digital divide and to bringing ICT to the service of development and all the peoples of the world. Adequate resources need to be mobilized and committed for achieving this goal. Stronger partnerships are needed among the donor community and between donors and recipients in order to avoid wasteful duplication and to foster collaboration and openness including amongst multilateral development institutions.

17. We call upon the international community, including the relevant international organizations, funds and programmes, and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, to urgently:

(a) Promote programmes to intensify cooperation, especially South-South cooperation, in ICT for development projects, including ideas and projects for enhancing direct connectivity among developing countries;

(b) Actively explore new, creative financing initiatives for ICT through appropriate arrangements involving all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector;

(c) Devise measures to substantially reduce the average cost of access to the Internet within developing countries;

(d) Promote measures to increase the number of computers and other Internet access devices in developing countries;

(e) Explore measures to facilitate access to ICT training;

(f) Explore and find ways to promote and facilitate investment in the research and development of technologies, products and services that would contribute to raising the literacy and skill levels in developing countries;

(g) Facilitate the transfer of information and communication technologies, in particular to developing countries, and support efforts towards capacity-building and production of content;

(h) Encourage research and development on technology and applications adapted to specific requirements in developing countries, including distance learning, community-based training, digital alphabetization, tele-medicine, interoperability of networks, and natural disaster prevention and mitigation;

(i) Explore and define ways and means to strengthen the use of ICT in small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries and countries with economies in transition as these enterprises constitute a major source of employment, and also to enhance their competitiveness in the emerging global economy.

18. Partnerships, involving national Governments, bilateral and multilateral development actors, the private sectors, and other relevant stakeholders, should play a key role. In this context, we note the proposal contained in paragraph 11 of the report of the high-level panel of experts convened from 17 to 20 April 2000 that the United Nations create an ICT task force, and we request the Working Group on Informatics to make recommendations regarding that proposal. The Working Group may submit its recommendations to the Council for its consideration.

19. The Economic and Social Council should review the mandates and activities of its subsidiary bodies dealing with ICT with a view to establishing modalities to provide the United Nations and Governments with comprehensive, practical and action-oriented advice on policies and programmes and on new developments in the field of ICT for development.

20. We recommend the endorsement of the present declaration at the Millennium Assembly.

21. We call upon Governments, the United Nations system, and the other members of the international community to urgently translate the present declaration into coherent and concerted actions. We request the Secretary-General to initiate, on an urgent and priority basis, all necessary steps to implement the present declaration, and to submit a progress report to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001.